



NOTEBOOK NEWS

■ NUCLEAR NOTEBOOKS

Scientists have unveiled a technological breakthrough that could result in nuclear batteries for laptops and other portable devices that last for more than a decade.

Scientists from the University of Rochester in the US explained that the next-generation atomic batteries, designed using a technology called betavoltaics, operate in a similar way to solar panels. However, instead of catching photons from the sun, the super-long-life batteries use silicon to capture electrons emitted from a radioactive gas, such as tritium. As the electrons strike a special pair of silicon layers within the battery an electrical current is generated, which powers the device.

The science of betavoltaics has been well understood for some time, but researchers have not been able to produce commercially viable batteries until now because output voltages were too low.

The University of Rochester's breakthrough, which solves this problem and paves the way for the technique to be used outside the laboratory, involves increasing the surface area of the silicon layers by adding deep pits so they can catch more of the radioactive decay and generate more electricity.

■ TRIGEM FILES FOR RECEIVERSHIP

Electronics giant Trigem has filed for receivership in Korea. The company, which owns Averatec, is waiting for the court's decision to see if it can trade its way out of its position. However, court proceedings can take up to three months, so it could be September before an announcement is made. The announcement doesn't affect Averatec's product range at the moment. "Averatec still has funds and stocks," said Andy King, Averatec's general manager. "We've got enough stock to last until September."

Unfortunately, the current court case means that Averatec won't be launching any of its new products, although King believes that they will be launched by September.

It's likely that Trigem will try to find a buyer for Averatec, in order to get some funds to help it out of its financial position.



REVIEW NOTEBOOK PC

TOSHIBA Libretto U100

RATING ★★

PRICE £1,398 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.com

DETAILS www.toshiba.co.uk

It's hard to avoid a distorted sense of scale when sitting in front of Toshiba's tiny Libretto U100. Although it has the same proportions as a full-size notebook, it takes up less than half the volume and is only about two-thirds the width of most compact systems. Toshiba has had to shrink the keyboard to achieve this incredibly small size, which gives the user the disconcerting impression that they have grown.

Despite this *Alice in Wonderland* feel, the Libretto is a fully specified Centrino notebook. It uses an Ultra Low Voltage (ULV) 1.2GHz Pentium M processor and has 512MB of memory and a sensible 60GB hard disk. The notebook is barely as deep as a DVD disc, so it can't accommodate an optical drive, but it comes with a docking station that includes a dual-format DVD writer.

With so little room on the Libretto's chassis it's hardly bristling with ports, but there are enough to cater for mobile users. It has two USB2.0 ports, network and modem connectors, audio minijacks, a D-sub port and even an SD card slot. Unfortunately the DVD dock adds no further ports or connectors and is no better than an external USB drive, which is likely to leave deskbound users frustrated.

A 1.2GHz processor may not set the pulse racing, but we found that it helped the Libretto to



some respectable benchmark scores. Its overall *Shopper* application score was bolstered by a strong audio-encoding result of 127, and with 512MB of memory it didn't fare too badly in our punishing image-manipulation test.

This notebook isn't suitable for advanced 3D applications or gaming, but it's designed to be highly portable. It weighs just 1kg, and its battery lasted for nearly four hours in our test.

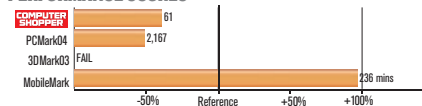
The Libretto's 7.2" widescreen display uses an LED backlight rather than the usual cold cathode source. Toshiba says this provides "rich contrast" and "brilliant colours", but it's dim at even the brightest setting. This is particularly problematic given the tiny screen and 1,280x768 resolution, and we found it hard to read standard-sized fonts.

The Libretto's biggest problem is its minuscule keyboard. Although the keys have a decent feel, they are simply too small for sustained and rapid typing. Touch typists will find it impossible to use.

There's plenty to admire about the beautifully engineered Libretto, but it's just too small for serious use. For the money, the larger Fujitsu Seimens Lifebook P7010 is a better buy.

Simon Handby

PERFORMANCE SCORES



✓ Tiny and light

✗ The screen and keyboard are too small

SPECIFICATIONS Pentium M 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM, 60GB hard disk, integrated Intel Extreme 2 graphics, detachable DVD writer, 7.2" 1,280x768 widescreen LCD, weighs 1kg

HOTLIST NOTEBOOK PC

AVERATEC 3300

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £656 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.wehavethings.com

DETAILS www.averatec.co.uk



At under 2kg, Averatec's 3300 is a highly portable notebook with excellent performance and features at a budget price.

It feels rugged and the keyboard, though a rather uninspiring shade of grey, doesn't flex during use and has a pleasant click action. The 12.1" screen's resolution of 1,024x768 is on the small side but is acceptable for office work and surfing the web. A large 60GB hard disk and double-format DVD writer are impressive for the price.

The 3300's chipset is an excellent balance between portability, power and price. It uses a



Pentium M processor to save battery life, but the 1.5GHz processor has more than enough power for the tasks that the notebook will be used for, and 512MB of RAM is plenty for most Windows applications. If you need an ultra-portable notebook but cannot afford to spend over £1,200, the 3300 is ideal.

SPECIFICATIONS Intel Pentium M 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 60GB hard disk, Intel 855GME graphics, 12.1" LCD. Part code AV3350-UE1



REVIEW NOTEBOOK PC

DELL
Inspiron 9300

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £1,499 inc VAT and delivery

SUPPLIER Dell 08701 524699

DETAILS www.dell.com/uk

Dell's Inspiron 9300 shares its chassis with the Inspiron XPS Gen 2 gaming notebook we reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* August 2005. Its processor and graphics card are less powerful, though, and its styling is more subdued. It is a large notebook with a huge footprint and thick base. At 3.61kg it's lighter than the XPS but still suited only to desktop use.

Despite using a mobile processor, the 9300 lasted just 108 minutes in our battery life test so it's not really practical to take on the road. It has no legacy ports for older peripherals, but it does have six USB2.0 sockets, FireWire, D-sub, S-video and DVI connectors. It has a gigabyte of RAM, which is useful for memory-hungry applications such as image editing, and 80GB of hard disk space provides a fair amount of storage. That said, we would prefer to see a 100GB disk at this price.

The 9300 feels very durable and has one of the stiffest displays we have seen, but its keyboard is disappointing, with wobbly keys that give little feedback. The touch pad buttons make a solid click, but the touch pad itself feels too small to navigate the enormous screen accurately. The 9300's 17" widescreen display has the same huge 1,920x1,200 resolution as the company's XPS Gen 2, leaving plenty of room for large spreadsheets and image-editing work. The screen itself is very bright with

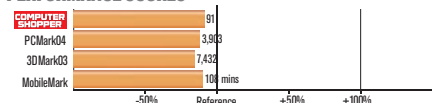
wide viewing angles, but large blocks of white appear grainy. The screen has a reflective coating that makes colours vibrant and contrast excellent. Blacks are deep and don't fade towards the bottom of the screen as they do on some displays.

The Inspiron 9300 has a 1.86GHz Intel Pentium M mobile processor. Its 2D performance is strong but not spectacular, with good scores in PCMark04 and the *Shopper* benchmarks, helped by an excellent score in the image-manipulation test. The 9300 also produced impressive scores in our 3D tests thanks to its nVidia GeForce Go 6800 graphics chipset, but its score of 43.2fps in Doom 3 is slower than those of other notebooks we've tested that use this chip. This difference is due to the 9300's slower processor, but it's still powerful enough to storm through the latest games.

This is a well-built desktop replacement notebook with strong performance in 2D and 3D applications. Its screen is one of the best available on a notebook, and as long as you don't need to stray too far from a power socket it does everything a desktop can while taking up far less space.

Chris Finnamore

PERFORMANCE SCORES



Powerful; stunning screen



Wobbly keyboard; terrible battery life

SPECIFICATIONS 1.86GHz Intel Pentium M 750, 1GB RAM, 80GB hard disk, nVidia GeForce Go 6800 graphics, DVD+/-RW DL, 17" 1,920x1,200 widescreen LCD, weighs 3.61kg. **Part code** N05936R

HOTLIST NOTEBOOK PC

HP
Compaq nx6110

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £470 inc VAT

SUPPLIER HP 08452 704222

DETAILS www.hp.co.uk

HP's Compaq nx6110 won a Best Buy award in our Labs test of budget notebooks (*Shopper* July 2005) thanks to its impressive build quality, screen and performance at the bargain price of £470.

The nx6110 has a serious matt black finish, and build quality is excellent with minimal flex in the base and screen and high-quality plastic surrounding the keyboard. The notebook's keys have excellent travel and feedback.

The nx6110's screen is bright with excellent contrast. At 2.75kg it is fairly portable. Inside are Intel's latest Sonoma chipset and an Intel

Celeron M processor, giving it plenty of performance for office tasks, but an extra 256MB of RAM would be a useful addition. Three hours of battery life is enough for computing on the move, and the notebook has wireless networking as standard. This is a high-quality notebook that is superb value at under £500.

SPECIFICATIONS 1.4GHz Celeron M 360, 256MB RAM, 40GB hard disk, Intel 915GM integrated graphics, DVD/CD-RW, 15" LCD. **Part code** PT601ET

BYTE
SIZE!

Our round-up of the best new gadgets and software

APC

Universal Notebook Battery

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £173 inc VAT

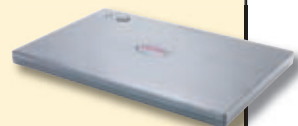
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.ukDETAILS www.apc.co.uk

Even the best notebook battery doesn't last

forever, so APC has created its Universal Notebook Battery. Similar in size to an A5 diary, it works externally. It comes with a set of adaptors and a voltage selector, so you can use it with almost any notebook. A full compatibility list is available on the website, but we had trouble finding a compatible notebook in our labs.

We eventually got it to work with an Acer notebook. Without the battery it scored 169 minutes in our battery test and with the battery connected it lasted 320 minutes. Almost doubling the battery life is good, but an external battery makes a notebook difficult to use on the move. It's also expensive, costing around £100 more than a spare battery.

David Ludlow

ACOUSTI PRODUCTS
AcoustiFeet

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £4.41 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.quietpc.co.ukDETAILS www.acoustiproducs.com

These squidgy silicon feet are designed to fit to the bottom of a PC case and isolate its vibrations, reducing the noise it might transmit to a hard surface. We used them to tackle a particularly buzzy tower case in a house with wooden floors, where vibrations from an ageing processor fan had been resonating through the floorboards into other rooms.

Fitting the AcoustiFeet didn't lessen the PC's noise output, but we noticed a marked reduction in the amount of humming transmitted to neighbouring rooms. The only apparent downside was that the case seemed less stable with the feet fitted. While they may appeal mainly to noise obsessives, AcoustiFeet do a decent job for a sensible price.

Simon Handby





BYTE SIZE!



Our round-up of the best new gadgets and software

THE NOVELTY GIFT COMPANY

Stereo Squealers

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.boysstuff.co.uk

DETAILS www.stereosquealers.co.uk

Every PC should have a set of speakers, but even the best PC audio systems tend to look dull. The Stereo Squealers, however, look like two little pigs. To start you need to feed them four AAA batteries, and one has a volume control for a tail.



The only fly in the oinkment is sound quality. The squealers could benefit from vocal training, and ours couldn't even manage stereo sound, but if you'll use them only for standard Windows noises and occasional music playback they'll suffice. Trotter down to the shops and buy some; at this price they're a squeal.

Tom Royal

THE NOVELTY GIFT COMPANY

Street Mouse

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS www.thenoveltygiftcompany.co.uk

MTV's *Pimp My Ride* is a show where old bangers are turned into lurid, street-worthy cars, and a UK series has just started. It's debatable whether anyone would want a lowered Hillman Avenger with block-rocking bass, but a bit of bling livens up PC kit.



This optical mouse is a copyright-safe amalgam of BMW, Seat Leon and VW Beetle. Connect it via USB or PS2 and its lights glow. It's between a desktop and notebook mouse in size, and is comfortable to use with buttons that click satisfyingly. Cursor movement could have been smoother, and we wouldn't recommend it for gamers, but it's a fun product at a fair price.

Simon Handby

REVIEW NOTEBOOK PC

WATFORD Aries Precision 1151

EXCLUSIVE

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £799 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Savastore 08716 661616

DETAILS www.savastore.com



AMD's Turion is a new low-voltage processor that's designed to compete with Intel's Pentium M series for notebooks. Watford's Aries Precision 1151 is the first notebook we have seen from this manufacturer to use this new processor.

The Precision 1151's base is about the same size as a sheet of A4 paper. It weighs just 2kg with its standard battery, so it just squeezes into the ultra-portable notebook category. Its all-black styling is understated yet smart, and it has a soft rubberised lid and metallic black keyboard surround. Despite its size it has room for three USB2.0 ports around the base, a slot-loading DVD/CD-RW combo drive and a memory card reader with support for MMC, SD and MS cards, as well as a FireWire port on the front. Its 40GB hard disk is not really big enough if you want to install games or store video files, though.

The Precision's small base means that some of the keys have a reduced width, but the main keys are large and provide good feedback. The keyboard flexes slightly, however. The recessed touch pad is accurate, so there is little need for an external mouse, and the buttons have a solid click despite their odd hinged design. Although the 12.1" reflective display is quite small, it has a fairly high

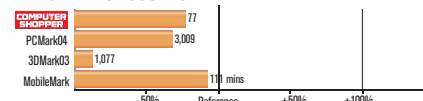
resolution of 1,280x800 pixels. Fortunately its sharpness and excellent colour reproduction make it easy on the eyes. Whites are very bright, but blacks are not as deep as on most reflective displays.

Despite its size, the Precision 1151 is a strong performer. Its Turion MT-34 processor runs at 1.8GHz, and it has 512MB of DDR memory, giving it a respectable performance in our tests. Its *Shopper* and PCMark04 scores are impressive for an ultra-portable notebook, and it even has some 3D abilities, although its Radeon Express 200M graphics chipset is not powerful enough for modern games. The battery is disappointing, however, lasting less than two hours between charges. A larger 8-cell battery is available for £50 including VAT, which is a worthwhile investment.

This ultra-portable notebook looks good and is well built with an impressive screen and good performance for the price. It's a shame the standard battery's life is so poor, as the point of an ultra-portable is that it can be used on the road. If you don't intend to travel with the standard battery, this is a stylish, powerful notebook and a good buy.

Chris Finnamore

PERFORMANCE SCORES



✓ Small and light; good screen

✗ Poor battery life; fairly small hard disk

SPECIFICATIONS AMD Turion MT-34, 512MB RAM, 40GB hard disk, ATI Radeon Express 200M graphics, DVD/CD-RW, 1,280x800 widescreen LCD, weighs 2kg. Part code MS-1013

HOTLIST NOTEBOOK PC

EVESHAM Quest Explorer

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £500 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.lowestonweb.com

DETAILS www.evesham.com

Although not the most stylish or compact notebook we've seen, the Evesham Quest Explorer has impressive performance for the price. It is fairly large and heavy, but the 1,024x768 resolution screen is clear and bright, although it has rather narrow viewing angles. The keyboard is at a good height for comfortable typing.

Aside from a DVD writer, little is missing in terms of features. The Evesham has plenty of ports at the rear and on the left of the chassis, although FireWire is missing. The only other significant omission is wireless

networking, but this is an inexpensive upgrade.

Performance is good, apart from the image manipulation score, which could be improved with an upgrade to 512MB of memory. For office work and occasional travel, the Explorer has all the right ingredients at a bargain price.

SPECIFICATIONS 1.6GHz Mobile AMD Sempron 2600+, 256MB RAM, 40GB hard disk, VIA S3G integrated graphics, DVD/CD-RW, 15" LCD. Part code Quest Explorer S26



REVIEW NOTEBOOK PC**ACER**
Ferrari 4005 WLMi

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £1,279 inc VAT (XP Pro); £1,209 inc VAT (XP Home)

SUPPLIER www.acernotebooks.co.ukDETAILS www.acer.co.uk

As an official supplier to the Ferrari Formula One team, Acer is allowed to use the Ferrari name and prancing horse logo on some of its notebooks. The Ferrari 4005 WLMi is the latest in this line of Formula One tie-ins, and it's far more subdued than previous efforts.

The Ferrari 4005's design is more subtle than that of its predecessors. While the Ferrari 3200 and 3400 had fire-engine red exteriors and silver keyboard surrounds, the Ferrari 4005 has a carbon fibre weave lid with red sides. The keyboard has a matt rubber surround, and the whole design is more tasteful. Build quality is excellent, with a very stiff base and screen.

The 4005 occupies a fairly large portion of desk space but it's slim and reasonably portable at just over 3kg. It can connect to just about anything, thanks to its four USB2.0 ports, one FireWire port, D-sub, S-video and DVI video outputs, wireless networking, Bluetooth and infrared connectivity built in. The front of the notebook has a 5-in-1 memory card reader and disable switches for wireless networking and Bluetooth, as well as a

slot-loading DVD writer that burns double-layer discs.

The soft keyboard surround is very comfortable, and the keyboard is pleasant to use. The keys provide good feedback but not a great deal of travel. The touch pad is large and rectangular to suit the screen's widescreen layout, and its buttons feel well made. The 4005 is shipped with a Ferrari-branded Bluetooth mouse, which looks great, although ours was erratic and difficult to use.

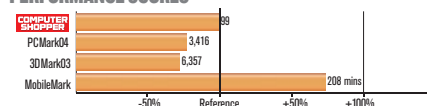
The 4005's 15.4" widescreen LCD has a very high resolution of 1,680x1,050 pixels, providing plenty of room for large spreadsheets. Contrast and colour saturation are excellent, and the screen produced some of the deepest blacks we have ever seen on a non-reflective display. However, large blocks of colour can appear grainy.

Although it shares its chassis and graphics chipset with the Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi, which we reviewed in *Labs*, *Shopper* June 2005, the Ferrari



4005 has a 2GHz AMD Turion ML-37 processor in place of the TravelMate's 2GHz Pentium M 760. It also has a gigabyte of memory. Its 2D performance is strong, if not quite up to that of its Pentium M-based sibling, but its 3D performance is as good, and it's easily powerful enough to run the latest games. The battery lasted 208 minutes, which is impressive for a powerful notebook, and its 100GB of hard disk space is the most you can currently get in a notebook PC. Whether or not you would choose Acer's Ferrari over the similar TravelMate 8104 is really a matter of personal taste. Some may find the garish exterior this is a well-specified and powerful notebook with a good keyboard and screen, plenty of 2D and 3D performance and many connectivity options at a very good price. It is not quite as fast as the TravelMate, but it's £70 cheaper and feels slightly more robust.

Chris Finnamore

PERFORMANCE SCORES

✓ Good performance, keyboard and screen; excellent value

✗ Design is an acquired taste

SPECIFICATIONS AMD Turion 64 ML-37, 1GB RAM, 100GB hard disk, ATI Mobility Radeon X700 graphics, DVD+/-RW DL, 1,680x1,050 widescreen LCD, weighs 3.05kg. Part code LXFR406.034

REVIEW NOTEBOOK PC**EVESHAM**
Voyager C520

RATING ★★

PRICE £799 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Evesham 08701 609500

DETAILS www.evesham.com

Intel's second-generation Centrino platform, often known by its codename Sonoma, brought the PCI Express graphics bus to notebooks. Even so, notebooks have a disadvantage compared to desktop PCs. Adding a new graphics card to your desktop PC is easy, but doing the same to a notebook is generally impossible.

A notebook PC's graphics chip is usually soldered to the motherboard, so you can't remove it. This has a second disadvantage, as manufacturers must wait for new motherboards before they can use the latest graphics chips. To avoid this problem, manufacturers recently agreed on the Mobile PCI Express Module, or MXM, standard for notebook graphics cards.

The Voyager C520 is the first notebook we've reviewed that uses MXM. Inside is an nVidia GeForce 6200 processor mounted on an MXM type II card. Although it's not designed for users to upgrade, you should be able to replace it with another type II MXM card in the future, as long as you're careful and handy with a screwdriver.

The Voyager is large, with a 15.4" widescreen display. Its chassis looks thin, but a bulge on its

underside accommodates the graphics card. Despite the notebook's deep feet, the air vent barely clears the desk and seems to struggle. Placing the Voyager on a flat surface causes the fan's pitch to rise, reminding us of a blocked vacuum cleaner.

The crisp screen has wide viewing angles but isn't bright enough at any setting. It's quite resistant to flex and has a sturdy catch and hinges, but it's easily discoloured by pressure from behind the panel.

The keyboard has a conventional layout and feels very well made. The key travel is long and there's plenty of feedback. Instead of two touch pad buttons the Voyager has a single bar, which we found too narrow and stiffly sprung.

Both the top and base of the Voyager's chassis get warm during use, and the area around the graphics card became particularly toasty during

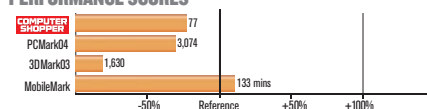


benchmark testing. Fan noise became quite noticeable when the computer was working hard. Heat, and the Voyager's 3kg weight, make it uncomfortable to use on the lap, and with just over two hours of battery life it's unsuitable for regular mobile use.

The C520's performance in our other benchmarks was not exceptional. It scored a solid 76 in the video-encoding part of the *Shopper* application benchmarks, but average results elsewhere led to a middling overall score. Its PCMark04 and 3DMark03 results were run of the mill. It managed only 1.7 frames per second in our Doom 3 test, so many modern games are beyond it.

As it stands, Evesham's entrant in our £750 Notebook Labs test on page 134 offers more power for less money. The company intends to offer an upgrade to a 128MB nVidia GeForce 6600 for £60 including VAT, but we can't recommend this notebook with the specification we tested.

Simon Handby

PERFORMANCE SCORES

✓ Feels well made; upgradable graphics

✗ So-so performance; disappointing battery life

SPECIFICATIONS Pentium M 1.73GHz, 512MB RAM, 40GB hard disk, nVidia GeForce 6200 graphics, DVD+/-RW DL, 15.4" 1,280x800 widescreen LCD, weighs 2.95kg



CHOOSING A...

NOTEBOOK
COMPUTER

Follow our simple step-by-step advice to find the perfect notebook PC for your needs and your budget

1 The minimum specification of notebook we recommend, shown below in grey, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This is an average notebook that should cost around £700. It is not particularly powerful or, at 3.5kg, particularly portable. Mobile processors increase battery life and are becoming more common, even at this price.

2 Most people want a better notebook than the minimum – but what is your definition of better? Do you want something more powerful, or lighter and better-looking? Desktop replacement notebooks, which approach the power of a full-size PC, are necessarily large to house the extras. These usually include a desktop processor and larger battery to keep the whole lot running for any length of time.

3 If portability is your main priority, keep the spec modest (a Pentium M 1.7GHz with a 15" screen, say) but spend more. This will buy you an executive notebook with the kind of cutting-edge design required to miniaturise without compromising usability. Clever chassis, expensive batteries and the finest materials are prerequisites for superior ultra-portable notebooks.

4 There are features you can add to a notebook without piling on weight or reducing battery life. A 60GB, 80GB or 100GB hard disk and 1GB of RAM won't hurt. Another possibility is an external drive that you can carry with you or leave at home according to the nature of your trip. Some ultra-portables can attach to an optional docking station, which incorporates drives, ports and extra power for when you need it. It's the best of both worlds, but tends to be expensive.

5 If you're not swayed by ultra-portable chic, you can get a lot more for your money. Today's desktop replacements pile on the features but still keep the price well under £1,500. Alternatively, go for a balanced package: middling power and price in a reasonably portable package. Which one you pick depends on how much power and which features you need, so consider each in turn.

6 Notebooks run the same software as desktops, so our advice on the core spec is the same (see page 15). However, hard disks go up to only 100GB and even the best notebook graphics lag behind desktops.

7 DVD rewriter drives are standard and will allow you to burn CDs and DVDs on the move. If you want to watch movies, consider buying a notebook with a widescreen display.

8 A 1,024x768 screen is the entry level these days, but its size will depend on the notebook's purpose. Ultra-portables might have screens as small as 9". Large widescreen displays have resolutions of 1,200x768 upwards but make for a bulkier notebook.

9 A modem and regular 10/100 Ethernet port are standard. Centrino notebooks also have wireless 802.11b or 802.11g (WiFi), and it's becoming increasingly popular on all models. IEEE-1394 (FireWire) and Bluetooth can be added to the default TV-out and USB2 ports. Memory card readers are extremely common, so check that your camera or MP3 player's format is supported.

10 Once you're happy with your spec, start to shortlist some models you can afford. Check the weight and battery life of each of them. If these aren't acceptable, you need to reconsider how much power and which features you really need.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE

(Recommended minimum in grey)

PROCESSOR: AMD Mobile Sempron 1800+
MEMORY: 512MB DDR
HARD DISK: 40GB
STORAGE: DVD rewriter
GRAPHICS: Integrated (using system memory)
SCREEN: 1,024x768 LCD
EXTRAS: Wireless networking, FireWire
CONNECTORS: Three USB2.0, network, modem
SOFTWARE: Windows XP Home Edition
WEIGHT: 3.5kg

BYTE SIZE!



Our round-up of the best new gadgets and software

PINPOINT skipDr

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.pinpointce.co.uk

Despite initial claims that they would be scratch resistant, jam repellent and generally invincible, CDs are easily damaged. The skipDr uses a geared, lightly abrasive polishing wheel to scrub the disc surface as it spins on a platter. A bottle of fluid is provided to lubricate this process.



Although the skipDr does an admirable job of removing light scratches and stubborn grubbiness, any substantial damage is only slightly improved. Some CDs and DVDs don't play because the label side is damaged, but skipDr can't help in this situation. It's an affordable way to give battered and bruised CDs a new lease of life, but don't expect the terminally damaged to return from the grave.

David McKinnon

SENNHEISER PX200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £28 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.unbeatable.co.uk

DETAILS www.sennheiser.co.uk

Nearly all portable music players come with in-ear earphones. Not all of them sound great and not everyone finds them comfortable.



These Sennheiser pad headphones are a great alternative. They weigh just 68g and fit comfortably. Even our most enthusiastic moshing wouldn't dislodge them.

The Sennheisers cope well with a range of music and volumes, punching out plenty of bass with detailed mid and high frequencies. Treble is slightly flat, but they're an improvement on all but the best earphones. They fold away to fit into a supplied case, and their closed drivers leak very little sound, leaving others in peace.

Simon Handby